

University of Dundee

## Citadel Love Stories - An Intergenerational Creative Storytelling Project

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# CITADEL LOVE STORIES

AN INTERGENERATIONAL CREATIVE STORYTELLING PROJECT



# Dear Reader,

This *little zine* contains the stories participants wrote in the summer of 2021 during three creative-writing online workshops co-organised by the Citadel Youth Centre in Edinburgh and researchers from the University of Dundee.

It all began with storytelling between people of different ages but with an inclusive attitude towards love and relationships. The youngest storytellers were in their mid-teens and the oldest in their early sixties. Many identified as belonging on the LGBT2QI+ rainbow. Some single, some in a relationship and other in polyamorous romantic relationships.

The online format was an excellent way to bring people together across both remote and rural parts of Scotland. We shared our story ideas together and gave each other feedback, until by the final workshop, we had produced our own finished versions. Some wrote their stories down, others told them verbally. The latter we transcribed in full. This zine contains many of those stories which we hope you will enjoy!

The full-page illustrations (and snippets of them throughout) were made by the visual facilitator Clare Mills of 'Listen Think Draw' who took part in the workshops. The front and back cover illustrations were commissioned later – created by Ashling Larkin. The design and layout was created by Juliet Neun-Hornick.

Co-Editors of the little zine are Dr Mei Lan Fang and Prof Judith Sixsmith, School of Health Sciences; and Prof Michael Gratzke, School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law – all from the vibrant Dundee City Campus of the University of Dundee.

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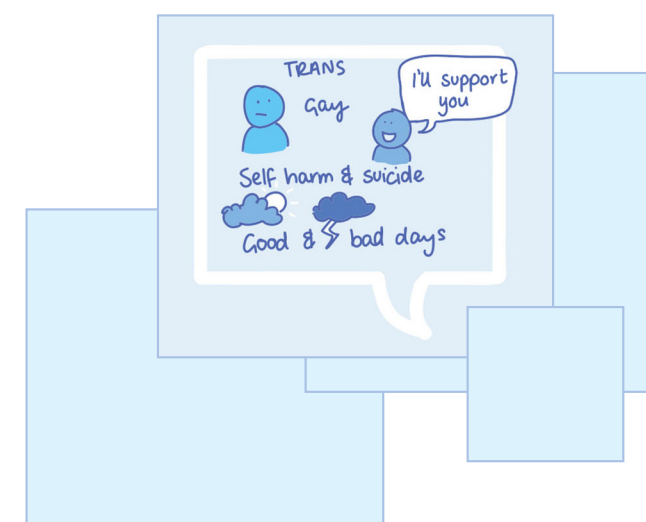
## Ash's Story by Ash

When my friend was 15, he came out as trans, and then a few months later he realised he was gay as well as transgender. His name is Andrea and he had felt like this since his younger years, but never quite knew how to come out. So, he went for some food and then we started to chat and then he came out to me, and I said, 'I will support you in the best way possible,' and that he could come to me whenever he wanted a chat or even a shoulder to cry on.

When he was 12, he started feeling low moods and started to use self-harm as a way to cope with his feelings and emotions and then a few years later he started to attempt to take his own life. And it seemed to me that I was the only one who could be able to talk him out of taking his own life. And once he was 15, he got put in a secure unit within Edinburgh and his low mood was getting worse, not better, than a year on. And he is now out of secure,

and he is living in Fife but still struggling to cope with his safety and his risk-taking behaviours and is still struggling to this day and is an extremely close friend.

I'm still looking out for him, and so is his boyfriend, and he is slowly getting better. Day by day, with the odd bad day and good days, but more recently he's had more harder days than easy days, but he's getting stronger. Every time we meet up or see each other on Facetime calls.



## Phil's Story by Phil

Being told to self-isolate sounds so ironic to me. Thankfully I've yet to receive the text or phone call to be told to 'duck and cover'. I came out and fell in love in the 1980s, when even expressing my need for human affection had to be covert. It's both ironic and I use that term advisedly because nuclear war preparation and the state sponsored image of the family was promoted as normal then.

My passions still flamed brightly, and I was reminded regularly that I was pretty far removed from typical normality. I learned the hard way to understand the need for compliance. I often employed 'stealth mode', silent running, to be and yet not to be in my collusion, collision and frequent

experience of social catastrophe. I have to admit, though sometimes it was kind of thrilling. Thinking of myself as being a type of outlaw.

So tell me about isolation; its cold silence and its petty exclusions. The sin, guilt and rejection are just blows to the bruises and gay bashing I've received in what already feels a long half-life. There's also nothing new in these current political times of systematic greed, petty ridicule and the erasure of self-identity.

I'm familiar with such state and media love-ins which fine-tune the bigotry with slippery tentacles to snare, silence and shame us. So rehashed, so familiar... so retro.



What's also familiar and continues to inspire, is how ingenious we can be in our now much broader and vibrant set of tribes. Expressions of our love always remain lodged as golden threads in songs, in art and in cinema. Morse code, enigma vibrations radiating out and feeding the ever constant desire for reflection, for glimmer and shimmer. Queer futurism in science fiction, generating inner light and love which soars no matter how polluted the atmosphere. We are a dazzling warrior people, our juices flowing and our spirits flying.

AIDS was the plague of my age, which we fought in isolation and thankfully we're now potentially beating. Blessed be the holy trinity of retroviral meds, of PEP and of PrEP. Covid might seem new and exotic but based on past experience, I just know we will ultimately survive. These deadly organisms seem to spread through well-trod paths of inequality in what feels like a rotten, oppressive state, but we always have our sense of self and our capacity for love.

No-one can control our minds and bodies, especially when we love. Subdued for a time but never extinguished, this year especially. Lock-down has however hit us all hard. Some of us were trapped in unsafe homes, living with hetero-normative families. We were often shunned by neighbours and excluded from services.

The emotional strain, the sense of perpetual attack, how could anyone avoid a siege mentality? I was fortunate, both as an only child I was self-reliant and familiar with introversion, but I also had my loves. I have a different relationship set up, you see and love for me isn't very traditional. I'm married to one and in love equally with two. I'm polyamorous and bidextrous.

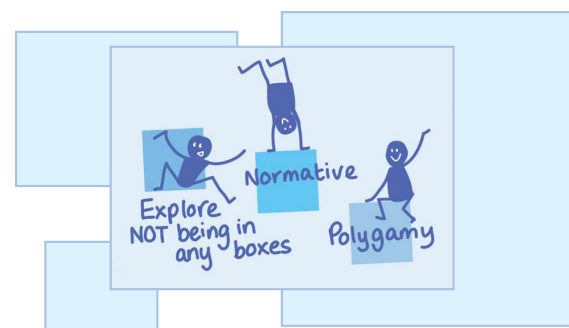
A few years ago, when the openness with my partner's love became much deeper, I felt two channels forming. If I'm honest, my heart sank. I fretted and assumed I'd potentially have to choose. I hiked up the yellow brick road and consulted a sage, a wise Saint. One who was canonised by my fellow Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and familiar with all things love and kink.

A simple and important question arose in our discussion, which was deploying the analogies of soup and sustenance. "Why do you feel you don't deserve the love of more than one person?" The other practical advice I received was to work equally hard in honesty and respect and to project manage my love. I had to balance this new aspect of isolation with my loves; the timings, the distances and recently the rapid flow testing. My 'pandemic poly bubble' formed and in lockdown this became my sanctuary.

I'm realistic and I feel the pangs of guilt about my privilege to still love at a time of such fear and climate of bigotry. I often reached out to those with less much human contact. I connected with friends and my community of often artistic and moderately angry sisters, brothers, neither both.

The internet became both a haven and for some of us, a curse. For preservation, I scheduled my love to the hour and to the minute. I balanced work, friendships and time with both my husband and boyfriend. Life and love in lock-down became much more about sensuality, reconnecting with nature and strengthened the trust and intimacy we all shared. My boyfriend even found the strength to come out to his family, a late bloomer.

We haven't tackled the conversation on the poly aspect yet, baby steps. The lesson I've learned, and the perverse blessing of this dreadful year has been unforgettable. Now the thaw is coming, the lifting of restrictions and the establishment of the 'new normal'. There it is, that word again. Normal. So rehashed, so familiar... so retro. This was learned: Whatever nature throws at us, however hostile the environment – if we love, we will live.



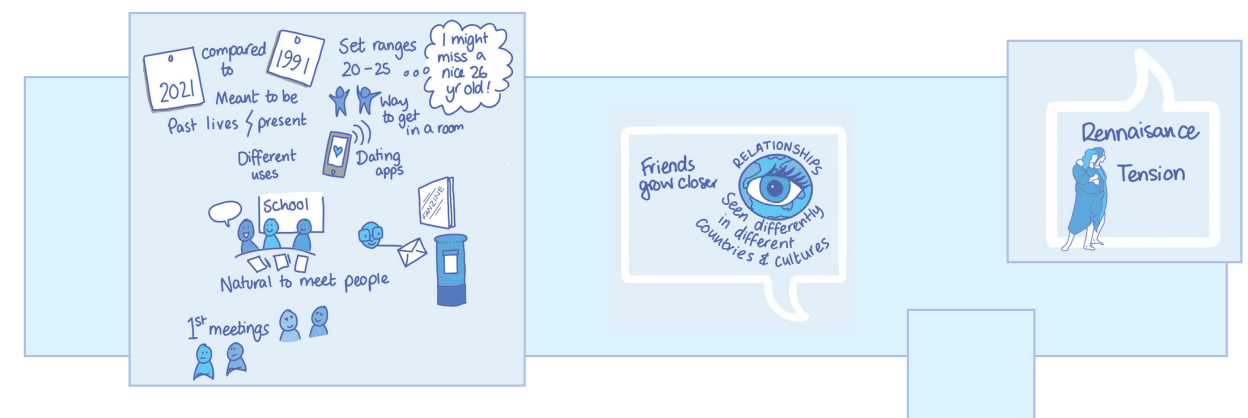
## Eva's Story by Eva

Me and Hailey were sitting in the school canteen, eating our usual baked potato with tuna. I sat there, staring at all the seniors wearing such cool and interesting clothes, wishing I had the confidence to do that. I contemplated telling Hailey for a few minutes, but I eventually thought "you know what, you only live once". So, I turned to Hailey and said nervously "I have something I need to tell you".

Hailey looked at me with a smile on her face, seeing that I was nervous. She said, "Sure go ahead".

I blurted out "I'm lesbian" trying to just get it over with. Tons of thoughts instantly rushed to my head, what if she doesn't accept me, what if she walks away, what if she slaps me, what if she thinks I'm gross, what if she thinks I have a crush on her.

Hailey put her hand onto my shoulder and said "cool". We both laughed at her odd reaction. In that moment, I wanted to hug her, hold her hand, kiss her, go on dates with her. But as friends, I had no feelings for her romantically, she was just my comfort person.



## Isla's Story by Isla

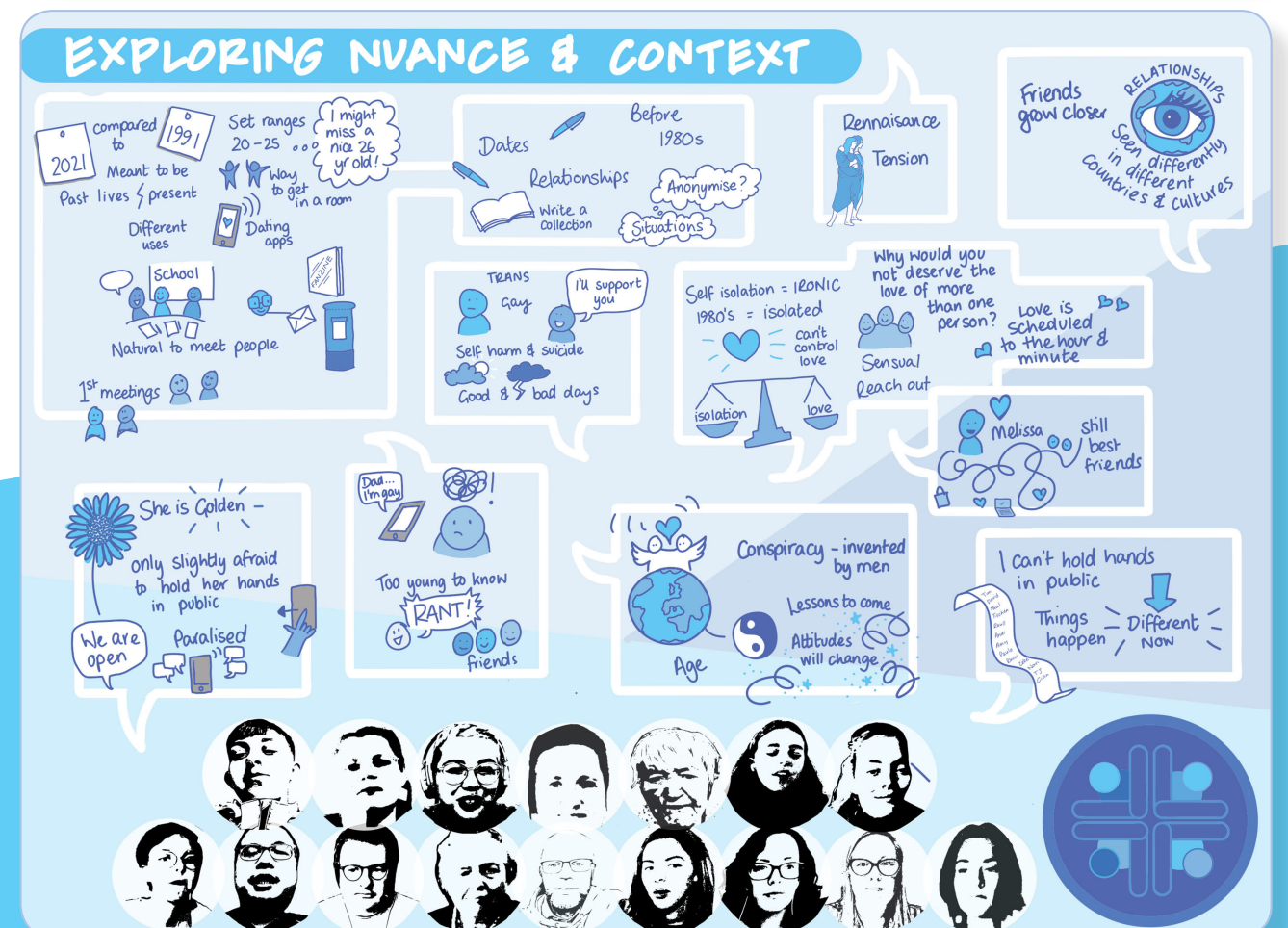
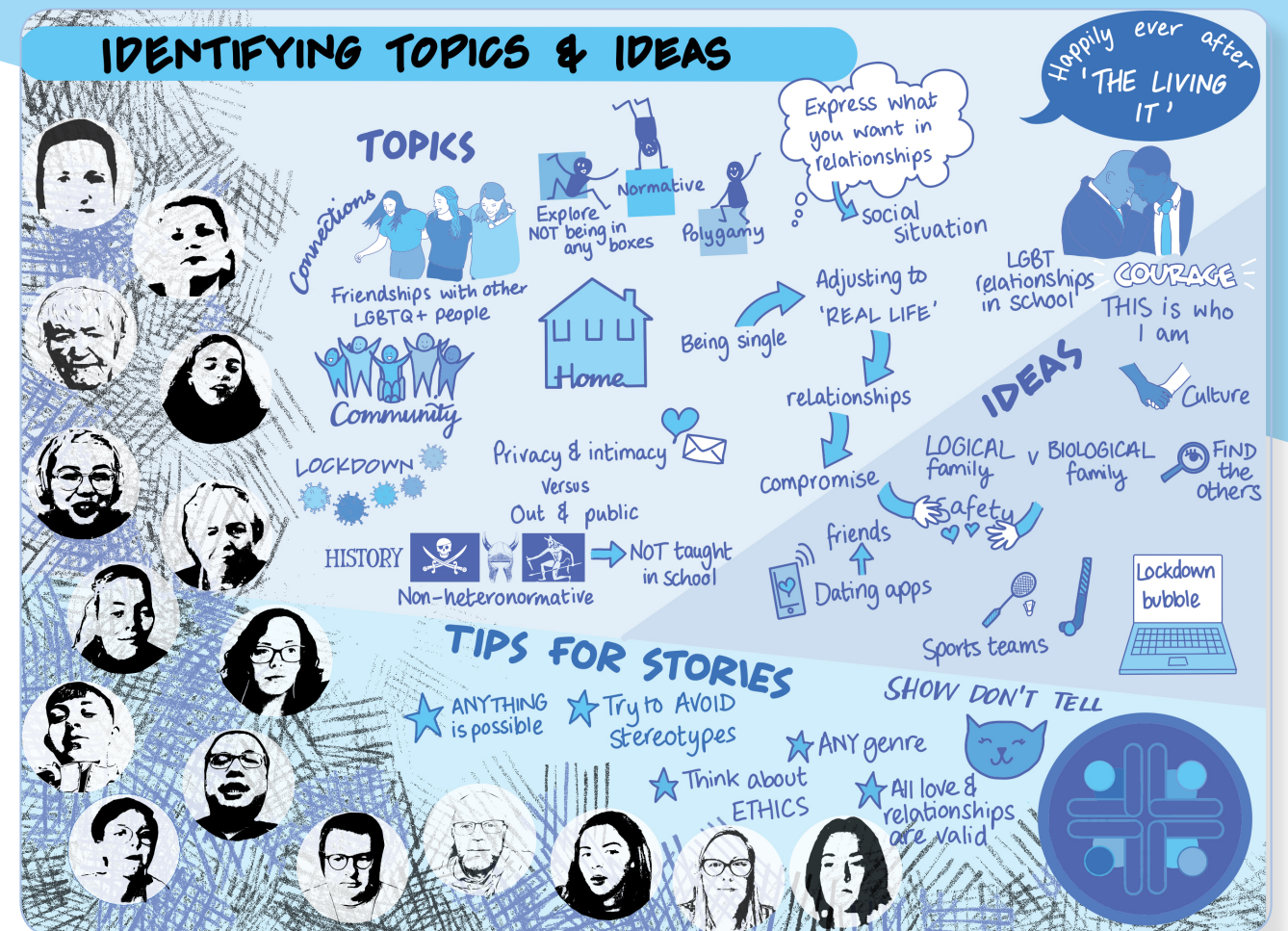
Two souls are bound in darkness, the deepest ocean or open space, both souls burning bright, yet they can't see. One is in search of their other part, someone that cares and will share their light. The

other is one is still, not knowing what they should do. Yet, with one on the move, they see each other, their flames begin to meet in the cold darkness, they join, at last, perfection—the two souls became one.



# I FOUND YOU by Fink (aka Kay)

Something sparked within me that day.  
Not sure what.  
But I noticed it.  
Somewhere deep within.  
Curious... compelling...  
Crash Bang Wallop.  
A curious, compelling feeling of familiarity?  
Familiar, yet un-familiar.  
Concurrently Connected.  
I looked into her eyes.  
I knew her.  
From. Somewhere.  
It felt right.  
She felt right.  
I felt right.  
We would be right.  
We waited.  
Edging closer by fraction.  
Fractionally familiar  
Fractionally fascinating  
Fractionally fantastic  
Transformed.  
To love  
Crash Bang Wallop.  
All consuming.  
Encompassing.  
Fulfilling.  
'You liked me before I liked myself but, you  
waited until I liked myself before you told me'.



# Jill's Story

## by JES - A late twenties, bisexual/queer woman

We bring each other daffodils and homemade lemon cake, the chill of a hopeful Scottish summer in our bones and under her white sheets. She cleans them every week as I lie on her bare mattress listening to the seagulls and the dull hum of her mother's television.

I borrow her pyjamas, though barely wear them. We feed each other meals our parents used to make us and ones we taught ourselves. We watch horror films and rarely make it past the first death before we are horizontal.

She is golden, and I tell her.

I find memes to send her, she sends me love hearts and teasing voice notes. I blush all the time when I'm with her. We are tickles of lightening, striking each other with kisses to elbow creases and inner thighs, cheekbones and shoulder blades.

Outside her office I present hand-picked daffodils and a deep kiss. A lady smiles at us as we part. That's my colleague, she tells me. I am only slightly afraid to hold her hand in public. I can't tell if people watch us. Though catching our reflection in windows, I understand if they do.

We are radiating. Her towering beside me, black curls gracing her shoulders and my flame hair kinetic in the heat of June, dancing around us.

We are honest, we peel off our skin in teasing strips. Discuss loving others, touching others and bask in the possibilities of our openness.

Our friends are introduced, she meets my mother. I am picturing our children. Life thrums on around us. We are desperate – as twenty-somethings always are – to find ourselves. The right job, meaning, washing powder that doesn't make our armpits itch. We still have hopes our youth will last forever, or, at least, that we'll make good use of it.

She's offered a job in London, and I visit on weekends. The summer down south is oppressive and holding hands on the underground is sweaty work. I breathe relief each time the wind greets me at Waverley.

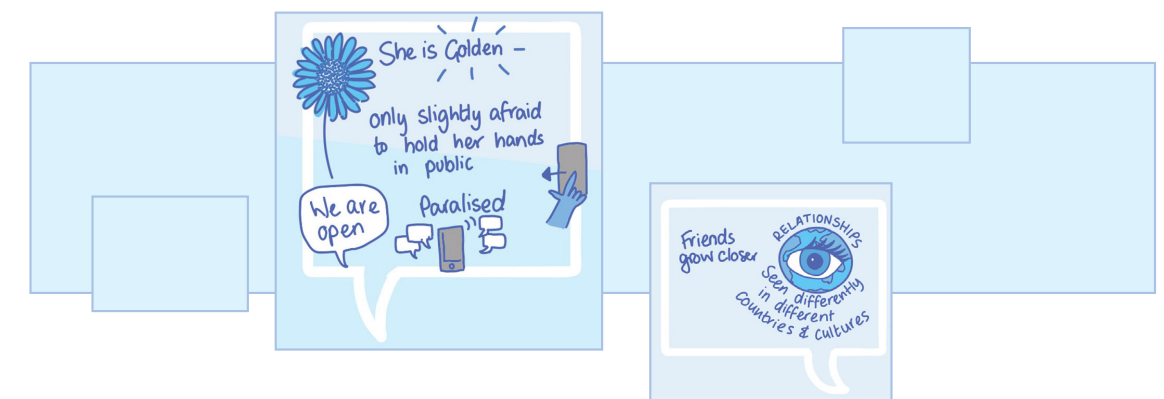
I run out of memes to send her, and her messages overwhelm me, twenty, thirty a day. I realise I am a whispered-morning-thought person, a traced-I-love-you-on-your-back person, a slipped-a-note-inside-your-bag person. I am paralysed by pings and read receipts. I am brought out of myself, placed beside myself, alienated by **Arial font** as I try to express my needs.

I realise, before she does, we're reading different editions. She's on the second arc and I am teetering by the cliff hanger. I'll save us a few weeks, I think, and pull us over the edge.

She calls me things I don't know if she believes. I take her words to therapy anyway and curl them up next to me as I sleep.

We bump into each other eighteen months later, I am stepping out of Waterstones, pulling off my mask, bagel seeds nested between my teeth. She's left London behind, she says, we should meet for coffee. I push her old stinging words deep into my bag, hoping she won't notice the stench, and I nod.

That night I think of our story, the curling lyrical blossom of our love, and I open the app where we first met. I begin to swipe. Burying memories of our ending in the quiet rhythm. Left, left, right, left, right.



## Moments by Judith Sixsmith

She is lying, cosseted, the bed soft beneath her.

He is sitting, contemplating, chair creaking. Gorgeous silence. "Dinner". "OK".

They move as one, then through the door towards the clattering pans and wrestling voices in the communal kitchen to make... what? It doesn't matter.

Later, hitting a ball beneath floodlights... to him, to her. Stopping, laughing, chasing, intense. Together either side of a flimsy net.

Back now, party time in student halls.

From across a mass of dancing bodies – "See ya next week". "K".

Tomorrow he will come, her partner, her lover.

The anticipating overwhelming. His smell, his body, his sound.

She has everything.

The love of a friend spelled out in each moment of togetherness.

The love of a partner, an intimacy spelled out in each moment of togetherness.

### The importance of this story for me

Time, early 1980's. Deep friendships with men other than the partner were less understood. Love in cross gender friendships not so recognised.

For me, the honesty of feeling expressed in the everyday moments that make up a relationship. It's not all about grand gestures and expressions of love. It's not about 'is this acceptable or not'. It's not about gender. It's about real appreciation of another person and those moments shared.



# Lara's Story by Lara

Lara came into the office. She said, 'Can I talk to you?'.

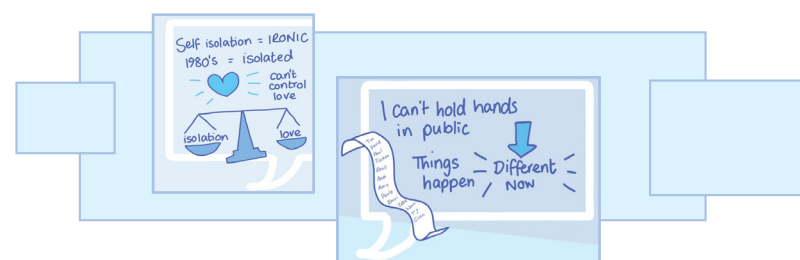
'Of course, I said. I knew that her boyfriend had accepted a job in London, and that she was finding the long-distance relationship difficult. So, I guessed that that was what she wanted to talk about.

She was in her early twenties. Her early life had followed a fairly conventional pattern; mum, dad, brother, university, first

job, steady boyfriend. But the past year had been difficult. 'I had a phone call last night', she said; 'from my Dad. He told me that he was gay; that he was in love; and that he was planning to move to the Outer Hebrides'.

I don't know how the story ends because Lara left the job shortly after that.

I have often wondered how it all turned out for them all.



# Hands by Tharin Phenwan - A Thai living in Scotland

I don't hold hands in public.

Not because I don't want to;

I can't.

I was from the time that we had to be cautious.

It had nothing to do with where I lived or where I worked. I need to be cautious.

Things... happen.

Jo. David. Tim. Matt. Doreen.

The lists could go on, but I will stop for now.

Nowadays, I see others holding hands and hugging openly; freely.

Expressing. Liberating.

Would it make a different to us way back? If we could live like this?

Maybe. Maybe not. They are gone, dead, twice.

As Eagleman said in his essay:

*'There are three deaths: the first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.'*

They will not die thrice; not while I am here. Not while we are still alive, right here.

So... I will continue not holding hands in public. I don't mind being cautious. And they will live on.

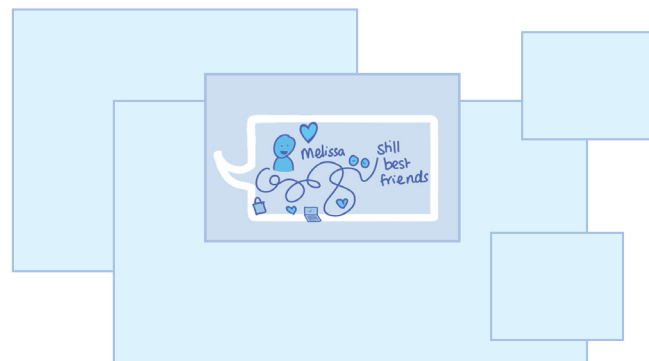
# Macie's Story by Macie

At 6.37 pm on the Sunday-- she knew that it wasn't ideal to tell him over text, but she felt nauseous every time the thought of telling him in person popped up. Why wouldn't she be nervous, she just came out to her dad—oh boy, she came out to her dad over text. Her friends were more than supportive, they encouraged her for months in the lead-up to telling him. Her mum accepted her, talked about her liking girls like she talked about her brother liking girls. They talked about attractive celebrities, and athletes of both genders, and it felt normal, it didn't matter to her. Her brother puts up the face of interest, but his support comes in the form of correcting his mates' use of language, slurs, and sticking up for her to them-- it's fine. She puts down her phone and think it's fine. Two days later, it's not fine. He hasn't replied to her, or her brother, or her mother, and her fear about ruining her relationship with her dad is now overshadowed by the crushing thought that she has ruined her brother's relationship with their dad. He won't reply to either of them. One day after that, she has a reply and he says he's fine with it, except she's too young to know, and except she isn't mature enough to make a life-changing decision like that. Wow, that makes her really mad, so, she rants and cries and yells about it with her friends. And her friends are there, they listen, and they accept, and they threaten to physically fight her father—I am not kidding. She laughs, what does his opinion matter to her when she's got people like that.



## Mei's Story by Mei

I adored Melissa. She was my best friend and my favourite person at the time. We worked together. We shopped together. We shared our clothes and we shared makeup. Her parents were like my parents. I thought my life was complete. I was so fed up with dating guys that I thought to myself, I can spend my whole life with Melissa, and I would be happy. I tried to imagine what it would be like to kiss Melissa and wondering if it sparked any physical sensation, but it didn't. However, for me at the time, it didn't matter whether there was any physical attraction or not but only that I was happy just spending all my time with her. I didn't care about getting married or having kids and at the time Melissa felt the same. But,



over time, things hanged. Melissa's mom started asking Melissa if she was a lesbian and Melissa said no but that she just wasn't into a lot of guys. However, Melissa soon started meeting guys online. She met Greg a computer programmer. He was handsome but I didn't think it would go anywhere. Melissa was really picky. After a year, Greg and Melissa moved in together. After two years, Greg and Melissa got engaged. I was devastated and she knew that I would be. Nevertheless, I was happy that she was happy. Melissa and I are still great friends to this day, and it has been 20 years. She has two kids now. Her little girl looks exactly like her when she was little. I would know. I've got a picture of her when she was 6.

## Nieve's Story by Nieve

We were walking out to our local farmers' market. As we walked, we saw our normal neighbourhood walking about—ladies hand-in-hand, soft kisses on the cheek. We were greeting all the people we knew and waving to the people we didn't know or didn't like. We got to the market, a quick kiss on the cheek, not a sly look in sight and we looked for dinner. Nothing fancy was for dinner as no guests were coming. We saw all the fabulous dresses



and art in the window behind the stalls and fruit, veg, and plenty of supplies. We rustled through the crowds in our dresses making sure we didn't lose each other. We picked up what we needed and started to walk back, making sure no one has pickpocketed anything from us. We walked back the same ways and hellos before. As we were settled in for dinner, no man came home, it was just the two of us enjoying our handmaid dinner together.

## It all started with a rainbow by Ryan McKay

It all started with a rainbow, accept this one was not on Earth.

Humans had left their terrestrial home eons ago, yet Sam could still remember as a small child learning about the vivid colours of the rainbow.

The rainbows of V391 Pegasi B were often as beautiful as Earths. Sam just wished their planet 8.75 billion kilometers away, had as endearing a name.

Looking out of the gigantic galactic high school windows, further memories of rainbows flooded Sam's brain. Like the dripping of a leaking tap, Sam's mind slowly filled with memories of what the colours of the rainbow used to mean.

At first scientific descriptions of light reflection, refraction and dispersal commuted from one neural pathway to another. Eager to remember more Sam's eyes looked out, focused but lost at the same time.

Gradually more of the colours of the rainbow than simply science arrived. Like a long-awaited parcel, it delivered to Sam's conscious, departed but vital information.

Sam recalled the teacher of the past reciting the importance of being an ally and fundamentally seeing all people as humans. Snapshot words rang like Church bells. Under their breath Sam mouthed, equality, acceptance, and mutual respect.

For the planet Sam called home, these were values he had only ever known. Whether human, alien, android, or anything in between, to not be valued in this way stretched Sam's beliefs like an unavoidable injury. Inevitable and painful, Sam struggled to believe such a world could exist.

Like the beating of a drum Sam continued to hear the teacher's voice. The children of Earth would often face prejudice at school for being who they really were. For loving who they really loved. Sam thought about his school friends and the far away galaxies they had arrived from. How many rainbows had they seen?

Wishing and knowing are two separate things, but Sam truly wished their rainbows like the Earth of long ago and the planet they called home, stood for the values they so cherished.





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